

THE EXPERIMENTER

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I



ANNABEL FRASER was taking life very seriously, even so long ago as when Luke Bailey fell in love with her; and as Luke was taking it pretty seriously himself, in his own way, they made quite a pair. She resented—or thought she resented—being fallen in love with for her face. And she was so used to being beautiful and hearing sweet things said about her that very likely she did tire of what would have been the breath of life to most girls. She preserves that pose still, though it is not so necessary as then, and I suspect she is seldom annoyed. Not but that she is splendid now, and will be when her hair is white. Age will touch her only as it does a picture or a statue. But of course thirty-four is different from twenty-six.

The reason Luke had never said those objectionable things was because he couldn't, being too busy thinking them. But Annabel misunderstood and supposed him to be the one among them all who appreciated her for her mental and spiritual traits, and so she decided—quite in cold blood—to like him more than the others. Will was her strong point. She was always talking about it. So she loved him because she willed it. Well, "He that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." There may be some kind of love that can be turned off or on. I'm not competent to judge. But once her mind was made up her slow blood must have quickened toward him, for if ever a boy was made to be loved, it was Luke. I should know. He had no mother when he was a little boy, and so adopted me because I was his next-door neighbor, and laughed when I found him robbing my orchard. I was old and alone, and he came into my life and taught me—wonderful things—love and hope—things that children know.

He was a few years younger than Anna-

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bel Fraser, conscious of his youth, and almost tragically anxious to be a good puppy and do as he was told—an attitude always pleasing to the Annabel Frasers.

So they became engaged, and this, so far as I could make out, was the manner of that remarkable transaction. He kissed her. Then they had a tremendous debate about whether she ought to forgive him for it. The forgiveness was accomplished at length, but it took a lot of magazine story dialogue to bring it about. The psychological kind. (She has written a few stories, you know, among her other—duties.)

The kiss had happened under the moon, in a garden with the smell of roses and the flutter of moths, and in the great house behind them a waltz with violins in it . . . and Japanese lanterns. And so he kissed her, being four-and-twenty and a man, and having just received his hospital appointment, and therefore beginning to think about a wife. And she used up the rest of that glorious evening in lecturing him, as I have said, for his joyous and innocent little sin; telling him all about how noble it was just to be friends, and how much there was to be done in the world, and how she had no time for that sort of love, but must work. And he, poor boy! having put the great question to her like a man along with his kiss, must wait through an interminable evening of roses and moonlight and waltz music, while she argued this way and that, and served up sociology—stale as yesterday's pancake—from her college course. But she said yes, at the end.

These solemn preliminaries over, encouraged by her glorification of a life of work, he shyly told her something about his own ambitions.

But Luke never had the gift of tongues. He probably made his few remarks mumbly, so that she only caught a word here and there. Not enough to understand. (Not that she *could* have understood, anyway.) For I know that when he used to talk it over with me, it would be a jumble

of technical language and boy's slang, made more incoherent by enthusiasm. Nevertheless through it all one thing was clear and intelligible as sunlight—the constant ache of Pity in him and the desire to be of use.

"I couldn't stand it at all, Mater, if it weren't for looking forward to doing my share."

"A physician ought to be more impersonal, I should think," I would say. "Can you do your best when you sympathize so?"

"For a while I can. I suppose I shall go to pieces sooner than if I didn't. . . . But knowing what I do I couldn't do anything else, you know. It may kill me to do it, but it would kill me worse not to, so there it is. . . . But it isn't quite so bad when you are working along the experimental line. Find out something new. There's so much to find out! H—— was trying to fix some guinea-pigs with cerebro-spinal meningitis, the other day. That's one of the mysteries, you know. Meningitis, pneumonia, scarlet fever—and, most of all, yellow fever. We don't know anything at all about them. I'd like to do something that way. Think of being able to save the kiddies from scarlet fever as they are saved now from diphtheria! A man might consider he had lived, eh, Mater?"

As that was the manner of his conversation with me, I supposed him to have talked in much the same way with her. And it is quite improbable that she understood anything of what he tried to tell her. No doubt she waited rather impatiently for him to finish, for she was heart and soul in a scheme of world reformation—meaning settlement work and potted plants at that time, though she has varied it in later years with other methods. Of course little things like the discovery of a disease germ, or skin-grafting, or making a club-foot into a real foot that you can walk with, must seem small matters to one who aims at nothing less than lifting the whole round world nearer the stars by one heave of her capable shoulders. She was patient, however, with Luke's little ambitions, smiling kindly as one does when a good child stammers forth some enthusiastic explanation of his little play with his toys; and he saw her dark eyes smiling at him kindly out of the shadows, and caught his breath at her beauty, and called her an angel and implored her to do with him as she would.

And so they were engaged, and he spent all he had upon a ring, and went back to the hospital to fit himself for his very small share in Annabel's big task of reforming the world. He wrote me letters, all of Annabel—Annabel—Annabel—and sent me pictures of her that I was to be sure to return. And oh! the times I had to be told how good she was, how wonderful! And how altogether contemptible and unfit was Luke Bailey. . . . Then his letters grew less frequent. I heard but little of him for a year, though I understood that he had a reputation for overworking himself. As to Annabel, she got her name in the papers as a society girl who had forsaken the pleasant life she was born to, for charity's sake; and because of her lovely face they all printed her picture, so she was a celebrated person.

II

LUKE wrote excitedly that Annabel was at one of the summer hotels that I could see from my window, and would I please call on her? She was the most wonderful girl in the world, he explained, with as much enthusiasm as though it was a new idea. He was coming in a day or so, himself—had been very busy but never forgot me. I would have gone to great lengths to please that boy. Had he wished to make surgical experiments upon my right hand even to amputation, I should have given it, freely—yet I put off calling on Annabel, saying to myself that she was young and I was old, and she could make the call herself. But she did not care to thus offer the first move, and the days went on until the one when Luke came.

On that June night I lay awake, thinking much about Luke and his lady-love. The stars were thick and bright, the hotels glowed silently among the black billows of the mountains, and the tree frogs were loud in their pleasure at the heavy dew. It was all that a June night should be, except that somewhere a cow was lamenting for her calf. In the night's stillness, her great voice boomed out its elemental grief with perfect regularity. As an arraignment of the conduct of the universe its eloquence was without flaw. I thought sadly of her little hour or two of delight as the soft nose fumbled for her ready milk, and then—the separation, the little creature borne away toward

its brief education for veal, or perhaps killed at once. Shudderingly I recalled a story that they sometimes killed the calf where the mother could see it done, so as to save her that long bellowing distress. For if she saw the end, of course she would know that it was over, and quietly go back to work (after something of a tantrum—rather sport to watch from the other side of the fence) upon her comfortable cud and the production of milk. Oh, well—what of it! One cannot shoulder the griefs of all the sorrowful animals in the world; nor of sorrowful human creatures. There is too much of it. So very much that one is not necessarily a coward to withdraw from it all, as I did, and read and write and think for a lifetime among old, bloodless books; like the monks in the Middle Ages. (Yet, it would be a pity if, having lived out one's life like that, one should conclude at the end of forty years that it had been wasted. Forty years is a good deal when considered in the lump, though when gone it is sand that slipped through the fingers.)

Luke Bailey had chosen the better way of living—that of violent work. But then he was a man and belonged to a new generation. In my young days, there was still the remnant of a notion that the world was being taken care of by a kind of absentee landlord—forgetful, but still one could depend upon the proper thing being done in time. Nowadays people seem to think they have to take a hand in the work. (A girl, too, is a very different creature in some ways. Better, of course). I thought with envy of his Annabel's education and her reputation as a golf player, and her settlement work. But of the girl herself I thought with distaste—how she was like a great pink-and-white dahlia with thick petals arranged perfectly, but never touched by bee or humming-bird, or butterfly, or human nose. And there she was now, over among the lights somewhere, and he with her. He had come and I hadn't made that call. He would be offended. He might even not come over to see his old friend. I tried not to be as jealous as if I were only one or two and twenty instead of far past the half-century mark. . . . "If I could only believe she is the right one," I was thinking—and then a pebble tapped against the window. I thrust out my head with its little thin, gray braids bobbing on either side, and

there, looking up, a pale blur against the dark lawn, was the face of Luke Bailey.

"Mater!" he called softly. (The word had been sentimentally agreed upon between us before he went to college, years before.)

"I couldn't go without seeing you, Mater," said Luke.

"I was beginning to think you could. I was trying not to be jealous of Annabel."

He laughed a little. "You needn't be jealous of Annabel." His voice mingled in a ghostly way with the rustle of a sudden gust of wind. "You needn't be jealous of Annabel. She—doesn't want me, after all, Mater—and there's only you."

I threw on a dressing gown and covered my gray wisps of braids with a shawl and stumbled out to him through the dark house. The slow half clock struck twelve, beginning as I opened my chamber door and ending just as Luke's arms, cold and wet with dew, went around me. And his lips against my old cheek were as cold as though the warmth of life could never return.

I sat on the top step, and he sat at my feet and put his head in my lap—very quiet.

"You aren't to blame her," he said at length, rather sharply, as though I had spoken some of my angry thoughts. "Remember *that*, Mater, always. It's only that she doesn't understand."

"What is it that she doesn't understand?"

"Me—and everything that I believe in most. The necessity of finding out things. The minute she saw me she began about how glad she was I had come, because she had to write a paper on vivisection for her club and wanted me to tell her all I knew about it. A lot of jays want to stop it, you know. They seem to think it's done for fun! They say it has never done a bit of good. They say—Oh—I don't know what they say."

"Well, this evening she talked about what a terrible thing vivisection is. I never saw her so worked up—and said she wanted me to help her write the paper, and—think of this!—to work against vivisectionists with the other physicians that are against them. What could I say? I let her go on. Then I said—I said—that I believed in it, that if it wasn't permitted, the whole science of healing would stop short and come to nothing. I told her that anybody that said that such experiments had

accomplished nothing were either fools or liars, no matter what their names were. I said that I had made experiments myself. I thought that would clinch it—and it did! She stopped talking, and rose up, like—like a queen, or something, and gave me back the ring—as if it were red hot—and went away . . . and . . . and that's about all."

"Give her time. She may see the other side."

"No," he answered apathetically. "I don't think she will. I don't believe she ever does see the other side of anything. People are so, sometimes. She wouldn't hear my case at all. If she had cared she would have listened to what I tried so hard to say. . . . It's such a queer world, Mater. I—I'm rather tired of it. But it's nice that there's always you. . . .

"She took me by surprise, so. If I'd had any idea what was coming I might have put up an argument. . . . Why, Mater, if you—if you had a baby, and it had diphtheria, wouldn't you bless the horse whose blood was made into antitoxin? Especially as it didn't hurt the horse one one-hundredth as much as docking his tail would? Annabel's horses," he laughed almost tearfully, "have docked tails. When I spoke of it she said, 'Oh, that's different.' She—she just wouldn't hear my case at all, Mater.

"I even tried to quote the Bible a little. —'It is expedient that one man should die for the people'—but she said it didn't mean what I said it did, and that anyhow such a comparison was sacrilegious. I didn't mean it so; only, it was a phrase that happened to be running in my head. '*It is expedient that one man should die for the people.*' It is so sensible. Of course it's expedient. Sometimes a man can accomplish a lot by dying, and if he can he ought to. And why shouldn't an animal die as well as a man? . . .

"Oh, Mater! If you'd ever been in a hospital—if you'd ever seen the out-patients come in—and what one can do is almost nothing. A little medicine, advice that won't be followed, and then back to tuberculosis tenements or to those places near the sewers where the shadings on the map get so thick that they're black, showing the death rate. . . . But if you get a kiddy on his back where you can take care of him for a while, why, you can straighten him out so that he has a chance of fighting his own

little big battles with the world. You take away the handicap, to a certain extent. So it seemed worth doing—orthopædic surgery did. I did want so to be a big surgeon—one of the way-up ones."

"Didn't orthopædic surgery seem worth while to her?"

"I wouldn't say that, though I never was able to interest her in it. That was because I'm never any good at telling things. I never can say anything the way I want to. If I could only have put it to her the right way—but you see she is one of these people who have such beastly good health always. D'you know I've sometimes thought that health that is too good is a sort of unsoundness. The body that is ignorant of pain has a flabby spot, like an unused muscle. Apollo Belvidere would cut up rough over a little toothache. The calmest faces in the world you'll find among cripples. The quietest eyes I ever saw belonged to a cancer patient. . . . Of course, one has to hate pain. It would be absurd not to do that. And yet—pain is only pain. There are worse things. So many very much worse things. . . .

"If only Annabel's crowd would spend a little of their own time getting after peddlers' horses and starving cats and dogs—if they'd investigate the gentle country butcher instead of sniffing round the doors of laboratories. . . .

"Animals—" said Luke—"I guess nobody likes 'em more than I do. Guinea-pigs are such jolly little codgers, and they do so get it in the neck. (Annabel and her friends seem to think we use nothing but dogs—I wonder why?) But, guinea-pigs or dogs—how many bushels of 'em tip the scales against a baby—even a no-count, trashy baby—and when it's a nice baby—one that ought to live for the sake of the race. . . .

"The truth is, Mater, we're up against it. The world's bound to be not altogether pleasant, any way you fix it. It takes pain to cure pain, and a hair of the dog that bit you—

"Cruelty? What isn't cruel? Meat comes from the slaughter-house, and I suppose it had a good time chewing its cud. Fish don't like to die, probably, and the hook they're taken with doesn't hurt a bit more than a lot of these experiments they're so hot about. We have to eat

animals to live. Why isn't that as bad as using them to find out things?

"Well—there—I've made you unhappy. . . . I say, do you remember how you caught me up in your apple tree? I never will forget how you looked up as I looked down. I was scared, and then I saw your mouth corners wiggle, and then you laughed, and I came down, and you had me into the dining-room and gave me some smelly, sticky fruit-cake. . . . That was about a hundred years ago—just about—in a hundred years, a thousand, where'll we all be? Shucks! What's the use of howling because you're hurt? Still, it is a major operation, you know, to be turned down like that—and—and there wasn't any anaesthetic." He drew in his breath sharply. "She is the most beautiful woman in the world. . . .

"I go South to-night. I just came up to say good-by to you—and her.

"Havana. Some army doctors are working on yellow fever down there. We are going down there to—to make sure. It may be a rather long job, and I didn't know when I might see you again."

"Yellow fever—why, my dear! I can't have you do that. It's dangerous."

He did not answer at once.

"No more than anything else, Mater. We're only going to—to take a look at the mosquitoes, you know. They think they've got the beast that carries the germ. *Culex fasciatus* most call him, though some think *Stegomyia* is a prettier name."

"I should think you could get all the mosquitoes you want right around here."

"Ho! These! Shucks! You people don't know anything about mosquitoes up here. All you've got is a poor little *Culex* something or other that does the best he can and doesn't mean any harm. Why, you never saw an *Anopheles*, and as for *Stegomyia*, he is a mosquito, I can tell you. There's all the difference that there is between rabbit hunting and going for big game in India."

But I was uneasy. "You know you must take care of yourself. Think of all you can accomplish in a long lifetime, so don't—take liberties with it—now, before it's fairly begun."

"Oh, yes," he said indifferently. Then he brightened up and lifted his head.

"You've no idea what a fascinating thing

this is. It's one of the mysteries, you know—yellow fever is, or has been. Finley is pretty sure, but hasn't proved it. It has to be proved. They want to verify the kind of mosquito that does the job, and how long after he bites a patient before he can give it to another—and—oh, a number of things. Just think, Mater! It kills fifty per cent., even when they have care. When they haven't—when it comes down on a city or a military camp, with a rush like fire, then it's nearly ninety per cent. And it isn't an easy death, you know . . . it isn't nice and clean and dignified—and mysterious. People were exposed over and over again, and it never touched 'em. And others that hadn't been near a case where knocked over, while others in the same house were all right. So what can you make of it? It simply can't be *fomites*. No, Finley is right. And Lazear—you heard about Dr. Lazear?"

His voice dropped to a tone of awe and respect. "He died. After he was bitten. It was in the yellow-fever hospital, and he saw a *Culex fasciatus* biting—and let it bite all it wanted to—though he knew—all but the proving—just what would happen. Well it happened. And you can't let a man like that die for nothing, you know. So they're going to prove it so that there can't ever be any more doubt. Sanarelli and the Frenchmen—they think Americans don't know anything. But we'll soon have the laugh on them."

"But what is *your* part in this performance, child? I take it these people are physicians of standing and years?"

"You bet they are! But—oh, well, I'm a choir-boy, an acolyte, a banger-on, an office-boy. The big guns have to have 'em, you know."

"And you are going to be a bacteriologist as well as surgeon?" said I, my pride in him swelling.

"Ye—es, that's one way of putting it." He laughed slightly.

There was something not quite frank in his manner, but I knew better than to force his confidence.

"Well—if it's nothing worse than entomological big game—I don't like it, though. Yellow fever—you are so much to me," I muttered.

"Am I?" He pushed aside the shawl from my head, and drew forth a wisp of hair, clipping it off with his knife.

"For a mascot," he apologized.

Then he rose, and turning his back, looked long at the distant glimmer of the hotel, with the heaving dark mountains back of it, and the thick brightness of stars above it.

"Queer she couldn't understand," he muttered. "It seems so simple. . . . Well, I'm off. Will you write very often, please? I may not answer regularly, but I think such a lot of your letters. And when there's a quarantine letters can come in easier than they can go out. And tell me—no—*don't* tell me about her. When a thing's done it's done. That's good surgery—make a clean job of it—saw off the bone and tie up the arteries—and forget about it—if you can. . . . Good-by."

He kissed me and very gently loosened my hands from his arm. I was trying to say so many things, chiefly imploring him, as a real mother would have done, to be careful.

At the gate he turned again, for the sake of using the word I loved—"Good-by, Mater."

III

ANY ONE who cares—but not many do—may read of the different circumstances of that great experiment. Of how, in the first place, they went into a little dark, lonely house, "in an open uncultivated field," and the little house was prepared for them with sheets and pillow-cases and all sorts of things that had been fingered by yellow fever. They wore clothing of yellow-fever patients; some of it had been taken from the dead. And so for twenty days they made free with death, slept with it, ate with it—I can't make out whether it was done with military precision and solemn etiquette, or whether they were jolly (the reports are so prim, giving nothing but the essential facts), but I suspect they played poker a bit and sang and strummed their banjos. I rather think they were jolly. Men of that sort are not apt to be solemn when danger is about. But it was unspeakable—that furnishing of the house. There was a loving attention to detail that would have cheered Dante, or the Inquisition. Still, there was one advantage, and that was the absence of mosquitoes. That was the whole object of this part of the experiment, you see—to keep out the mosquitoes. And no-

body in that horrible little place—"So far as possible resembling a ship's hold"—was sick. That meant that *fomites* had nothing to do with it, and that quarantine is of no use whatever.

So then they went to a much pleasanter house, with fresh air and sunshine and clean linen—clean as surgeons understand cleanliness. And here, also, there were screens, and half of the house party lived on one side of the screens and the other half on the other side. And again no mosquitoes could come in. But—some *were* in; they were waiting in one half of the house. And that mosquito half of the house you might call the front of battle, if you liked to be heroic about it. Here your officer charges uphill, waving his sword, and fame comes to him who is first over the fortifications.

Here it was that Luke lay down for thirty minutes upon a bed, his chest and limbs exposed; smiling, I don't doubt, that one-sided smile of his; perhaps whistling a soft, tuneless whistle. (He was nearly tone deaf.)

So he gave himself carelessly to what he believed, and what the physicians in charge believed, to be danger of death. I see him lying at his ease, and smiling . . . and somewhere the operatic Siegfried throws aside his operatic clod of earth—

"Denn Leben und Leib,
Sehl!—so werf ich sie weit von mir!"

—and then—a mosquito is as effective as Hagen's spear.

For in due course the fever arrived,— "with most unfortunate termination," says the report. But I shall always think he would have come back, if Annabel had wanted him to. The old maid whom he called "Mater" wasn't enough. So he died.

And I'd give something to know whether Annabel still thinks it was done out of curiosity gone mad, and that his fate was the punishment of a just and angry God. Or, doesn't she think at all? Whatever her thoughts are, however, they move in but two dimensions. Thank God I can think in three, even though it is at times a dreary business. But perhaps, later on—wherever it is that Luke is now—one can think in four, and in that way get at the meaning of things that seem to have no meaning now. . . . One can imagine whatever one chooses about those things. One can im-

agine, that the truth will be something simpler and better than what we have imagined.

I had such strange dreams after Luke died—not unpleasant dreams. . . . I thought I was young again—young! I! I thought I was at the beginning of my long loneliness. (Selfishness, as I see it now. What business had I to live alone in that big house? I had a notion of self-culture, God help me!—thought I was going to write in that big lonely library with all those choice old books of my father's—so sat there forty years and did nothing. Forty years!) But in one of the dreams that forty years' mistake had not begun and I was the young girl that still expected a lover. It was dusk—just too dark to read, though I was reading to my eyes' hurt. (The "Decline

and Fall," I think, for I was improving my mind vigorously.) The scent of the narcissus was very strong. And the gate-latch clicked in the old, old way . . . and it was Luke. Luke! who wasn't even born until twenty years after that. . . . And then I woke, and youth was so strong in me that I must light a candle and look in the glass before I could believe that I was old. . . . I wonder if Annabel Fraser ever dreams of him?

They know all about yellow fever, now. He was only one of those who died to find out; and others who still live have undergone the same danger for the same purpose, for the world is full of courage. And in the end, I suspect, not even the Annabels matter, though they do make it hard at times for the world to get forward the way it wants to.
